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Employment in the voluntary sector continues to rise

Latest Labour Force Survey figures for the first quarter of 2010 show that the voluntary sector now employs 778,000 people, an increase of 6.5% over the last year. This is in contrast to the public and private sectors which have shown a decrease of 0.5% and 2.3% respectively.

The findings were produced by the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in partnership with Skills -Third Sector, the registered charity working to make it easier for people who work and volunteer in charities and social enterprises to have the right skills to make a difference to people and their communities. The findings come as part of an ongoing study being conducted by these three bodies into overall voluntary sector workforce trends.

One of the reasons why the workforce of the voluntary sector is currently bucking overall employment trends is that the main fields that the voluntary sector works in have not yet been affected by the recession.

Analysis shows that 93% of voluntary sector employees work in social care, health, education or real estate (housing). These industries are still growing in employment. In contrast, numbers of employees in mainly private sector industries, such as finance, manufacturing and construction, have decreased over the last three years.

However, it should be noted that these increases in voluntary sector employment may not continue. The funding patterns of the sector mean that there is a lag between what affects the private and public sectors and what goes on to affect the voluntary sector. The recent Budget has outlined large cuts to the public sector, and this is likely to significantly impact on the voluntary sector over the next year, in particular the sectors highlighted above.

“Given the role that Government wants the sector to play in both the delivery of good public services and in supporting communities, it is vital that we retain this growing workforce and ensure it maintains the skills it needs to succeed in a difficult economic climate. We will be consulting with the sector and key stakeholders on a national strategy to achieve this,” says Julie Wilkes, director of Skills – Third Sector. (See “notes to editors”.)

- Janet Fleming, Skills – Third Sector’s director of knowledge management is available for comment/interview upon request.

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Notes to editors

- Founded in October 2008, Skills – Third Sector is working to identify and address skills gaps and shortages for charities, voluntary groups, social enterprises and cooperatives. It is working with Sector Skills Councils to open up learning opportunities for voluntary sector paid staff and volunteers, and is ensuring the sector's needs are properly considered and addressed in the design and development of national occupational standards, qualifications and apprenticeships. The Office of Civil Society (OCS) in the Cabinet Office and the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) are providing initial funding for Skills – Third Sector.
- For more general information about Skills – Third Sector and its work, please visit: www.skills-thirdsector.org.uk
- A National Skills Strategy represents the foresight needed to bring about the kind of workforce for a professional and thriving voluntary sector. Skills – Third Sector's public consultation with the sector to develop this skills strategy involves nine regional roundtables and an online consultation. For more information, please visit: www.skills-thirdsector.org.uk/research_policy/skills_strategy_consultation/
- The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) is the umbrella body for the voluntary sector in England, with sister councils in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. NCVO has nearly 8,000 members, ranging from large national bodies to community groups, volunteer centres, and development agencies working at a local level. With over 280,000 staff and over 13 million volunteers working for our members, we represent and support almost half the voluntary sector workforce. (www.ncvo-vol.org.uk)
- The Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) exists to develop the research on, for and with the third sector in the UK. Led by the universities of Birmingham and Southampton, the Centre was established to provide a strong evidence base to inform policy-making and practice. The Centre works in collaboration with the third sector, to ensure its research reflects the realities of those working within it. TSRC is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, Office for Civil Society and the Barrow Cadbury Trust. (www.tsrc.org.uk)